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U.S. Government Pledges $10 Million to UNEP

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Following is a statement by Richard E. Benedick, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, before the 13th session of the UN Environment Program (UNEP) Governing Council, Nairobi, Kenya, May 15, 1985.

I would first like to express to the Government and people of Kenya, on behalf of the U.S. delegation, our deepest appreciation for their warm hospitality. It is always heartening to visit this beautiful and friendly country and to experience its striving and progress toward a better future.

I would also like to record my government's recognition of the executive director's dedicated leadership during the past year. Dr. Tolba, the United States much appreciates your frank and informative introductory report. You have well portrayed the difficult environmental challenges the world community must confront now and in the years ahead. At the same time, your description of recent achievements as well as yet unachieved opportunities encourages us that meaningful further progress is, indeed, possible.

One has only to consider the tremendous growth of environmental awareness since the 1972 Stockholm conference to conclude that a true environmental ethic has emerged. Concern for protection of the global environment and wise stewardship of natural resources has now become institutionalized in our thought processes and social systems. The fact that environmental concerns find, for the first time, a prominent place in the declaration of the recently concluded Bonn economic summit is a symbol of this growing realization that protection of the environment is inextricably linked with economic progress. And with new generations sensitized to the importance of preserving the earth's vulnerable life support system, there will be no turning back.

I believe that it is important to make this point because, as Dr. Tolba points out in his report, the nations of the world, individually and collectively, are confronted by problems that severely test their ability to pursue vigorously the environmental principles and goals which were enunciated in Stockholm in 1972 and reaffirmed 3 years ago by this council. We must not, however, allow these problems to overwhelm us or to cause us to doubt either the value of our quest or our ability to persevere.

One immediate problem is financial: budget deficits and external debts continue to constrain our ability to mobilize resources for environmental programs. During the next 2 weeks, we must give this problem careful attention. For my government, the solution lies along two paths. One requires expanding UNEP's financial base. The executive director has been working to identify imaginative new approaches. We must all try to help him in this effort.

The second, equally important issue is to ensure that available resources are applied selectively, wisely, and efficiently to those tasks that UNEP is uniquely qualified to address. For UNEP, this must mean concentrating program investments in highest priority areas where significant results are possible. In recent years, under Dr. Tolba's leadership and with the governing council's guidance, important steps have been taken to focus the program. However, as an institution with limited funding, UNEP cannot attempt to function as a traditional UN development institution. It cannot compete with the Food and Agriculture Organization or the World Health Organization, for example; nor should it try. We must avoid scattering our scarce funds—$100,000 here, $200,000 there—on small projects that, on one hand, may fall within the responsibility of others and, on the other hand, are incapable of making a meaningful difference. The United States believes that further concentration of UNEP's program is both possible and necessary.

Unfortunately, there has been some recent speculation and an unwarranted atmosphere of crisis concerning the U.S. Government's funding for UNEP. I might remind this council that the budgetary process in the United States is very different from that of parliamentary systems. In any event, the end result is what counts, and I am pleased to report that the United States will contribute $10 million in 1985 to the Environment Fund. The fact that this level of funding is being sustained at a time when serious budget constraints have forced us to reduce contributions for other international organizations should be viewed as evidence of the importance we attach to UNEP and our recognition of its achievements. I must caution, however, that the United States will

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have difficulty in maintaining funding of this magnitude if it continues to constitute one-third of total contributions to the Environment Fund—this is clearly a disproportionately high U.S. share in comparison with U.S. support for other international organizations. Therefore, we urge other governments to increase their contributions to UNEP.

In his report, the executive director has highlighted the problem of drought and desertification in Africa. The enormity of human suffering from this calamity has touched the hearts and minds of hundreds of millions of Americans and citizens of other countries throughout the world. It is also a sobering reminder of just how far we have to go to achieve the objectives of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. Desertification is a worldwide environmental problem of enormous proportions which requires a long-term solution. It must be a major concern of UNEP. At this point, however, the United States is, frankly, doubtful whether UNEP's current strategy is correct. My delegation will address this issue in more detail under agenda item 7.

Sound environmental decisionmaking must be based on good scientific data and analysis, and UNEP has a vital role to play in this process through GEMS [Global Environment Monitoring System] and other programs. The Global Resource Information Database (GRID) program is an important initiative to which the United States has provided important technical support. I might also mention that the U.S. delegation to this council includes Dr. George B. Nelson, an astronaut from our National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Dr. Nelson was a member of the crew which carried out a 7-day mission on our space shuttle last year, and he will be involved in another flight in November.

We are impressed with the actions taken by the executive director to reform the information program and particularly to provide more information about UNEP-sponsored activities. We endorse his recommendation that the 1987 State of the Environment Report be devoted to presenting the best data available on environmental conditions and trends, drawing on UNEP's own activities.

Along with desertification, the information program, and GEMS, the United States attaches very high priority to the regional seas program, which has been one of UNEP's most successful activities. We are very concerned that ongoing work on the Caribbean Action Plan and the negotiation of a convention for protection of the South Pacific not be adversely affected by the prospective move of the program's headquarters from Geneva to Nairobi. We will look to the executive director to do everything possible to ensure that there is no loss of momentum and effectiveness of this valuable program.

The completion in March of negotiations on the Convention to Protect the Ozone Layer was a noteworthy achievement. We hope now to join with other nations in building on the valuable framework for cooperation which was agreed to in Vienna and in the further consideration of a protocol on measures to limit emissions of chlorofluorocarbons.

The United States also regards with satisfaction the recently completed work in Montreal on guidelines for control of land-based sources of marine pollution.

Last June, the first meeting of legal experts on environmental impact assessment was convened in Washington. We believe that the draft goals and principles developed at that meeting represent a solid basis for further work. We trust that this council will approve the necessary measures to move this effort forward to an early and successful conclusion.

I would like to thank the executive director for his role in convening the World Industry Conference on Environmental Management in Versailles last November. This was a landmark meeting, with the potential for opening up a new era of cooperation between government and industry in managing the environment. We fully support the proposed joint UNEP-International Chamber of Commerce meeting later this year.

UNEP has also done a good job in recent years in attempting to harness the energies and talents of nongovernmental organizations, as represented by the recent Global Meeting on Environment and Development organized by the Environment Liaison Center. I can report that the U.S. organizations which participated clearly came away with renewed enthusiasm.

With respect to several of the new program directions proposed by the executive director, we will reserve our judgment until we have heard the views of other council members. We would, however, register an early expression of concern regarding the idea of establishing environmental targets. While goal-oriented activities are commendable, we should avoid promoting unrealistic or unmeasurable targets, which can only lead to failure and criticism. In this regard, the funding and environmental targets established for the desertification plan of action come readily to mind.

As an initial step, the council might consider a pilot research project within GEMS, utilizing UNEP's ongoing work on environmental indicators to determine which targets might be useful and feasible. Thus, we believe that what is initially needed is a small research effort on target setting rather than the early establishment of ambitious new targets.

With these initial observations, the U.S. delegation looks forward to a constructive and useful meeting under your leadership. ■

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